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TO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 9327
INFO RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 1342
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 6851
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 5373

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SIPDIS
CAIRO FOR TODD WATKINS AND DAVID BERNIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT OF ERITREAN REFUGEES IN EGYPT

REF: CAIRO 2585

¶1. In response to reftel, Department confirms it has informed UNHCR on several occasions that the U.S. stands ready to consider for resettlement all referrals of any nationality, including Eritrean, from Egypt.

¶2. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration/ Office of Refugee Admissions (PRM/A) Director Terry Rusch and Overseas Processing Section Chief Kelly Gauger met with UNHCR's Resettlement Service Chief Vincent Cochetel in Geneva in October on the margins of the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR). They reiterated the U.S. willingness and capacity to consider any number of referrals from Egypt. Cochetel informed all WGR attendees that a "Flash Appeal" requesting resettlement of Eritrean refugees in Egypt could be forthcoming, depending on UNHCR's access to the Eritreans in detention. However, UNHCR/Washington informed PRM/A on December 31 that UNHCR still did not have access to many of the Eritreans in detention. At PRM/A's request, UNHCR/Washington conveyed to UNHCR/Egypt Deputy Director Katharina Lumpf the continued interest of the U.S. in accepting referrals of those to whom UNHCR does have access. UNHCR/Washington noted that when UNHCR obtains access to the Eritreans, third-country resettlement is often sought on an expedited basis. For this reason, UNHCR has turned to other resettlement countries, particularly Canada, given the length of time it normally takes for the U.S. to process individuals for refugee resettlement. The Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) requirement for Eritreans makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the U.S. to process Eritreans in less than 2-3 months' time, particularly given the current SAO backlog at one of the clearing agencies.

¶3. It is important to note that the U.S. cannot consider any case for refugee resettlement unless referred by UNHCR, a U.S. Mission, or an NGO that has received specific training from PRM and the Department of Homeland Security/ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS). The U.S. does not accept direct referrals for resettlement consideration from a foreign government. Thus, although we stand ready to assist, there is very little we can do until UNHCR, the Embassy, or a qualified NGO is given access to and refers the Eritrean refugees in question.
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